

South East Allotments Officers Forum
Allotments Regeneration Initiative
21st June 2011, Epsom Town Hall, Epsom
Meeting Report

The Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI) is managed by the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG) and aims to help anyone involved with the creation or regeneration of allotment sites. All advice and services are offered free.

Paul Neary is the South East ARI Mentor and he chaired this event, which was well-attended, giving allotment officers the opportunity to come together and discuss issues arising. Further information about the ARI can be found at www.farmgarden.org.uk/ARI.

Allotment News from the South East

Chinham: New housing in this Parish of 1200 has provided Section 106 contributions, plus some funding from the local authority, towards the creation of a 38 plot site. The total cost was £60k but this is for an exceptionally high-spec allotment site, including fencing, pathways, water and electricity.

Finchampstead: Land offered by the company Cemex, which was formally a tree nursery, has been developed into 20 plots, with 20 further plots to come. The total cost was £7k and has provided plots of 'family size' at 125m² and 'family garden' at 80m².

Worthing and Adur: They are exploring moves towards self-managed sites but some issues regarding the grounds maintenance contract. They manage eight sites with a total of 1100 plots.

Epsom and Ewell: Ongoing improvement works to their sites; including the creation of a garden area for users in one site where it was previously overgrown and derelict. They have a large waiting list and have been looking to reduce this by offering smaller plot sizes.

Berstow: In these adjacent two parishes, Berstow and Copthorne, the former has all available allotment sites ie. all Copthorne residents use Berstow, but only 15 of 50 plots are used. There was outline planning approval for the development of eight affordable homes on part of the site. However, one individual was not happy with the proposal, even though the majority of the village were happy, and has proceeded to take legal action to halt the development. This is still ongoing.

North Warnborough: Ex-RAF site whereby part has been developed for allotment use. Some issue around the moving of fencing at the boundary to ensure security to the adjacent RAF base.

Pittstone (National Trust site): Four acres have been converted to allotments. Some restrictions apply; sheds must be National Trust green and some produce is limited, ie. no fruit trees, even step-overs.

Hook: The Hook Allotment Association is run as a CIC and provides 146 plots over four acres. 50 plots have had leases sold on them.

Canvey Island: Four sites here with one derelict. Serious problems of anti-social behaviour at the latter site, specifically around the dumping of building waste. There are serious problems with contamination and this is due to be cleaned at approximate cost of £5k per half acre.

Tatsfield: This small parish has negotiated the 25-year lease of two acres for an allotment site, at the cost of loss production and not land value, therefore £1k per year. The site, 64 plots, is managed by their local horticultural society. Funding has come from various sources and is still being applied for. There were some problems installing water to site by Thames Water, however they are now requesting works from under their community fund. An award-winning compost scheme collects green waste from the village, composts this and then asks for a £1 donation to receive the end product. This scheme is moving to the site. They also have two containers on site and looking to harvest rainwater from these.

Wider Issues

Trading standards are increasingly watching how local authorities are providing information as to size of allotments plots. All must now be shown in metrics, ie. m² and not rods (can be shown in brackets after metric value).

Wyvale Garden Centres, part of the Garden Centre Group, have started to offer allotment plots within their sites. The plots measure 90m² and include a shed, for £250 per year, or shed, greenhouse and water butt for £500 per year. More information can be found here: <http://www.thegardencentregroup.co.uk/GYOPLOTS/GYOPLOTS,default.pg.html>.

Water Harvesting

A good scheme was highlighted from a parish council near Milton Keynes. The site is adjacent to a main road, lying lower than the roadway. Working with the highways department, managers at the site have diverted run-off drains into a raised pond. This stores water before it is needed and feeds through filters into the wider watering network of pipes across the site.

In Herstmonceux water run-off from a barn fills an underground tank, donated by the Harveys Brewery. If this is exhausted they can switch to mains water instead.

Worthing and Adur undertook a cost analysis of water bills in their allotment sites and found the average bill per year/per plot was £46 yet the rent was only £36.

Wells were discussed; there are some issues around the cost of a licence if the well is younger than about 50 years.

The use of hosepipes and sprinklers varies, with some moving towards the idea of a ban but concerns from users. In Reigate and Banstead they ensured that all plot holders were within 20m of a water tank.

Localism Bill

Under this bill local authorities are obliged to provide allotment sites if requested within Neighbourhood Plans.

Beekeeping on Allotments

Kimberley Gimenes talked about her experience of keeping bees in allotments. Initially she placed an empty hive on her plot to generate the conversation, as opposed to just asking permission from other allotment holders, which had the potential to push a no answer through based around lack of understanding and fear of bees. Whilst the empty hive was there, another plot holder complained he had been stung, but she was able to say it wasn't her bees (there were none there) and allay further fears.

She now has several hives, some on her allotment, all sited correctly to limit problems to neighbouring plots. The introduction of the bees has also provided an opportunity for many people to come along with her and get involved, including some teenagers who use the public right of way to go home. Negotiations and information with other site tenants have meant that bonfires, which can disturb bees, are generally started at dusk, after most of the bee activity has stopped. Furthermore, some plot holders are delighted with the effect on their crops, boosting the numbers of fruit.

Further information can be found here:

BOOK: Guide to Bees and Honey by Ted Hooper

Defra: <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase>

British Beekeepers Association: www.britishbee.org.uk

Downloadable examples of beekeeping on allotment agreements can be found here:

<http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari/resources/resource-centre/general-site-management/beekeeping>

Brighton and Hove Beekeepers Group: This group of approximately 45 people has recently started. They are providing a valuable service to the allotments, helping to monitor rules and regulations across the allotment sites.

Tour of allotment site with Sean Harvey, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council.

Next meeting: This will be in Southwater, near Horsham, in approximately six months – I'll keep you posted.